

Durham County Council Apprenticeship Strategy 2022 - 2025



“I’m excited to start my career in accountancy and I’m looking forward to meeting new people and receiving a regular wage”

Accountancy Apprentice - Josh

1.1 Foreword

The council's apprenticeship strategy and programme are an integral part of the council's approach to address current and future skills needs. Apprenticeships help us to attract and retain the very best talent and to benefit from a skilled, motivated and flexible workforce.

To support the delivery of our Council Plan and Workforce Strategy, we are committed to investing in the continued expansion and development of our apprenticeship programme. Through increasing the range and number of apprenticeship opportunities, we can help to improve the skills of our own workforce together with the skills base across the County to help create more community health/wealth.

The world of work continues to change together with how public services are delivered. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on how we work and as we continue to respond and transform we will ensure that the council has a workforce capable of meeting the needs of its changing communities and those that live in them. Apprenticeships will continue to play a vital role in ensuring we can respond effectively to those changes.

This apprenticeship strategy identifies how we will use apprenticeships to attract new talent to the organisation as well as identifying opportunities for the development of existing employees aligned to our strategic approach to workforce planning, to ensure we have a workforce capable of meeting our communities' needs both now and in the future.

Apprenticeships also provide us with an opportunity to improve the diversity and inclusion of our workforce by providing people from all backgrounds with a greater opportunity to progress with their careers.



John Hewitt
Chief Executive



Amanda Hopgood
Leader of the Council

1.2 Introduction

The council introduced its first Apprenticeship Strategy in April 2019, this detailed what we wanted to achieve as an employer and the positive action we would take to increase the number and range of apprenticeships within the council as part of our wider Workforce Strategy.

Our achievements from April 2019 to March 2022 include:

- 627 new apprenticeships and 622 upskilling opportunities created (services and schools) – as at 10 March 2022
- Working with 31 different training providers to deliver 93 different apprenticeship standards – as at 10 March 2022
- Use of new apprenticeships standards e.g. Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Public Health, Environmental Health, Senior People Professional, Leisure Team Member, Community Sport and Health Officer
- 71% of apprentices retained in employment with the council (excluding schools) – as at 10 March 2022
- Recognised in the government's Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers List
- Mapping of relevant apprenticeship standards to all service areas to maximise the use of apprenticeships for new and existing employees
- 'Apprenticeship first' approach to qualifications introduced to enhance the skills, knowledge and competence in occupational areas
- Embedded apprenticeships into workforce planning to support a 'grow our own' approach especially for specialist and hard to fill posts
- Regional local authority apprenticeship group established to share best practice

The Apprenticeship Strategy has been updated to reflect our continued commitment to progressing our apprenticeship programme as part of our Workforce Strategy which is linked to our strategic workforce planning approach and people strategies.

The strategy embeds our OPEN values of outcome focused, people focused, empowering and innovative, by investing in our employee's skills and development to equip them to deliver high quality services for our communities and to achieve the best outcomes.

This strategy also aligns to our council plan which is the key corporate planning document for the organisation – setting out our direction for the medium term and showing how we will take forward our ambitions for **our economy, our people, our communities, and our environment**. The council plan also outlines how we will make **our council** more efficient and fit for the future.

The Apprenticeship Strategy specifically links to our council plan ambition for a thriving economy with more and better jobs and fewer people suffering from the hardships of poverty and deprivation, most notably through the strategic objectives to give young people access to good quality education, training, and employment, and to help all people into rewarding work. It is also pivotal to our council ambition to create a workforce for the future.

The strategy is also aligned to our Workforce, Regeneration, Procurement, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Autism strategies together with the council's strategic approach to supporting and sustaining care leavers and people with disabilities in employment.

We work with a range of organisations and services both internal and external to the council, to deliver and promote the benefits of apprenticeships, and link apprenticeships to career pathways, workforce development and workforce planning for new and existing employees.

The strategy will be used to inform workforce development plans and to help identify the actions that service areas will take in support of the strategy to meet the specific skills challenges that they face. The apprenticeship programme also supports and complements other workforce development initiatives to support entry to employment, including work experience, traineeships and graduate programmes as part of the council's wider talent management approach.

1.3 The council's apprenticeship vision

Increase skills through apprenticeship opportunities for new and existing employees across the council to provide people from all backgrounds with greater opportunities to progress their careers and enable the council to benefit from a skilled, motivated and flexible workforce

Apprenticeships will form an integral part of workforce and succession planning to ensure we have the right people with the right skills at the right time to deliver high quality services and to build a council for the future.

Apprenticeships provide the council with the opportunity to:

- Meet the priorities of the community such as tackling local unemployment, NEET (not in employment, education or training), skills issues and contributing to our strategic ambitions and objectives.
- Influence suppliers and partners to employ and train local people by promoting apprenticeships via social value commitments during procurement and planning projects.
- Support the council's 'corporate parenting' responsibility by offering employability opportunities to care leavers.
- Set an example to the wider community as both an exemplary employer and commissioner of services.
- Grow talent and use strategic workforce planning to ensure the council has the skills needed to meet the needs of our communities both now and in the future.
- To be an inclusive employer and further develop our workforce diversity for example by bringing young people into an ageing workforce and people with SEND as a Disability Confident Leader.

1.4 Strategic context

1.5 Meeting current and future skills needs

The council aspires to be an employer of choice, ensuring that it attracts, develops and retains the most diverse, creative and innovative individuals with the key skills and abilities required now and for the future. Apprenticeships can support this by offering a wide range of career opportunities for all ages.

Through our strategic workforce planning approach, apprenticeships are a key element to support workforce planning within service areas and are used alongside the wider corporate workforce development offer to develop current and future skills.

We also have an ageing workforce and so adopting a more strategic approach to 'growing our own' talent has become increasingly important, and apprenticeships will form a key part of the strategy to enable us to meet our corporate and service objectives both now and in the future.

We have adopted an 'apprenticeship first' approach to qualifications so employees can also benefit from developing the required competence in their occupational area as part of an apprenticeship.

The council's apprenticeship programme aims to support the council's wider strategic commitment to sustainably, improve the employment prospects and social mobility of local people, and to strengthen the skills base of our existing and future workforce by providing high quality jobs and learning opportunities with related qualifications which are embedded in career progression routes.

"I am just so grateful to progress my career while remaining in the job I love. The Social Worker apprenticeship gives me the best of both worlds as well as helping me gain additional experience and knowledge"

Social Worker Assistant - Esther

1.6 Government policy

The government introduced a number of apprenticeship reforms in April 2017 to support an ambition to address the shortage in skills and investment in the UK's future workforce. This included the introduction of an Apprenticeship Levy which is payable by all employers with a wage bill in excess of £3 million per annum. This is paid as a 0.5% tax on the employer's payroll.

The levy is a significant cost to the council, it is therefore imperative to ensure that it is utilised as effectively as possible.

The public sector apprenticeship target was also introduced by the government in April 2017 which sets a target for any public sector employer in England with at least 250 employees to employ an average of 2.3% of their employees as new apprentice starts on an annual basis.

The target is for new apprenticeship starts which includes both newly employed apprentices and any existing employees that have begun an apprenticeship. The government considers the duty to 'have regard' to the target to mean that in making workforce planning decisions, public bodies should actively consider apprenticeships, either for new recruits or as part of career development for existing employees.

All maintained schools (excluding Voluntary Aided schools) pay into the apprenticeship levy and are part of the public sector target for apprentices.

1.7 Supporting the council's strategic priorities

As one of the largest employers in the North East, providing apprenticeships and routes into apprenticeships within the council is an integral part of the council's wider regeneration approach and also supports educational improvement priorities by helping to raise skills aspirations.

In the period July 2020 to June 2021, there were around 16,100 people of working age classed as unemployed in County Durham. Of these around 5,200 were aged between 16 and 24 years, this relates to 14% of the resident economically active population of the same age for County Durham which is lower than both the North East (15.1%) and national average (16.9%) (ONS). However,

this is up from youth unemployment pre-pandemic which was 8.3% for the same period in 2019. At its peak over the pandemic, youth unemployment reached a peak of 24.9% in County Durham in the period July 2020 to June 2021.

In particular the challenges of finding work impacts on certain groups including young people, care leavers, long-term unemployed people, returners to the labour market, people with disabilities and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This was heightened during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Providing opportunities for existing employees to undertake apprenticeships and developing an apprenticeship culture at all levels within the council will help to raise skills within the workforce in support of skills and wider workforce planning priorities around recruitment and retention and improve the age diversity profile of the workforce by attracting younger people into apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships can be an alternative option to university whereby young people can undertake structured training whilst earning money and working towards nationally recognised qualifications on which to build a future career.

The Organisational Development/Workforce Development Team within People and Talent Management will work closely with colleagues in other services including Economic Development, Education, Business Durham, Children's Social Care and Corporate Procurement to ensure that the council's strategic response to apprenticeships as an employer is closely aligned with the council's wider strategic priorities to supporting local people into sustainable employment.

In line with our social value obligations to drive the economic, social and environmental benefits for communities when making decisions about how contracts are awarded and budgets are invested. When employing a contractor factors such as the businesses' environmental policies, apprenticeship programmes and community outreach work are taken into account, alongside considerations such as quality, price and timescales for delivery.

The County Durham Pound project builds on this to drive forward recovery measures and accelerate our work to develop a more sustainable local economy. This is being achieved by working with developers and suppliers to identify social value and wealth building opportunities.

In addition, we want to be an ambassador for apprenticeships in the county and play an active role in reducing the employment equality gap and encouraging business to support apprenticeships and recognise their value. This will include introducing a levy transfer policy to support Small and Medium Employers (SMEs) who don't have an apprenticeship levy pot to fund training.

1.8 Apprenticeship programme aims

It is important that the council is able to attract and retain apprentices and that we develop an apprenticeship programme that:

- Supports our workforce skills needs.
- Supports the council's strategic ambitions and objectives.
- Creates opportunities to provide more and better jobs and improve the skills base in the county.
- Maximises the use of our apprenticeship levy.
- Has regard to the public sector apprenticeship target.

Our Apprenticeship Strategy aims are to:

1. Continue to develop the council's apprenticeship programme to increase the number of high-quality apprenticeship opportunities across the council

- We will work to develop an apprenticeship culture by utilising apprenticeships as a tool to support strategic workforce planning.
- We will increase the range and vocational areas in which apprenticeships are offered.

2. Ensure effective systems are in place to support apprentices and to monitor the quality of the apprenticeship experience

- We will make sure apprentices receive high quality training and support and feel engaged with the council and the work it does.
- We will develop and apply robust systems for monitoring the quality of the apprenticeship experience, ensuring that improvements are implemented in a timely and rigorous manner.

3. Widen participation in the council's apprenticeship programme, by targeting and maximising opportunities for those who face the most challenges to accessing employment

- As the corporate parent we will support care leavers to access apprenticeship opportunities, identify opportunities to engage with young people and adults including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and work with other disadvantaged groups e.g. long-term unemployed, returners to the labour market, people with a disability and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

4. Support people to progress into employment through the apprenticeship route

- We will work with apprentices to support them to develop the skills they need to move to the next stage of their career.

5. Work in partnership with Members, Trade Unions, training providers, suppliers, businesses and other local authorities to promote and deliver apprenticeship opportunities

- We will work in partnership to develop and promote apprenticeship opportunities.

6. Engage with maintained schools to ensure they maximise the benefits from the levy and promote apprenticeship opportunities

- We will continue to provide advice and information on apprenticeships that are relevant to schools such as Teachers, Teaching Assistants, School Business Managers, Early Year Practitioners to develop opportunities to address skills gaps/future workforce needs and to maximise the use of the levy.

1.9 Performance monitoring

This apprenticeship strategy is underpinned by an Apprenticeship Delivery Action Plan which sets out how the aims of the apprenticeship programme will be delivered. The delivery plan will be monitored by the Head of HR and Employee Services and progress will be reported to Corporate Management Team on a bi-annual basis through the Apprenticeship Activity Report.

In accordance with the public sector duty requirements the council will also publish annual data relating to their progress in meeting the 2.3% apprenticeship target set by the government. Details of the council's public sector target - [public sector apprenticeship target](#).

Action plan for the delivery of Durham County Council's Corporate Apprenticeship Programme 2022- 2025

Action 1: To continue to develop the council's apprenticeship programme to increase the occupational range and number of high quality apprenticeship opportunities across the council.

Actions	Responsibility	Timescale	Update/Progress
Work with managers to identify apprenticeship opportunities as part of workforce planning and a 'grow our own' approach to addressing skills shortages/hard to fill posts	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Embedded into workforce development plans for each service area
Undertake an annual recruitment programme which advertises apprenticeship opportunities to attract new talent to the council	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Annual rolling programme
Review the recruitment and selection process to ensure suitability for attracting apprentices	Head of HR and Employee Services	May 2022	To be undertaken as part of the Recruitment and Selection review
Introduce apprenticeships in additional vocational areas for existing and new apprenticeship standards	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	All new apprenticeship standards mapped and promoted to service areas including when new standards become available
Increase higher and degree level apprenticeships to aid succession planning and address skills shortages	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Links to graduate recruitment programmes for Level 7 apprenticeships
Create career pathways linked to apprenticeship standards to support workforce and succession planning	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2024	Embedded in the workforce planning approach

Develop pathways to apprenticeships through strengthening approaches to work experience/placements, traineeships, supported internships, T-Levels etc.	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2023	To develop and promote offer available
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Action 2: To develop and apply robust systems to support apprentices and monitor the quality of the apprenticeship experience.

Actions	Responsibility	Timescale	Update/Progress
Support apprentices with an effective induction programme, apprenticeship forums, communication and development programmes	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Programmes in place and will be further strengthened
Support managers with advice and guidance to ensure a quality apprenticeship experience	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Apprenticeship guidance for managers in place
Undertake independent apprenticeship reviews to identify if the apprentice is being provided with a structured work programme and if they require any additional support in the workplace/with their training to make the apprenticeship a fulfilling and successful experience	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Independent apprenticeships reviews held every six months
Strengthen the approach to mentoring of apprentices to ensure all mentors understand and are supported in their role	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Mentoring training in place
Monitor progress of apprentices and completion of apprenticeships through on-going liaison with training providers, apprentices and managers	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	
Set up process to evaluate completed apprenticeships for satisfaction levels and identify learning and opportunities for continuous improvement of the Apprenticeship Programme	Head of HR and Employee Services	June 2022	
Strengthen processes to monitor the quality of training providers	Head of HR and Employee Services	June 2022	

Appoint apprentice ambassadors/spokespersons and link into the National Apprenticeship Service Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Network	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	
Share apprenticeship success stories and development through a variety of communication channels with all employees and managers	Head of Communications and Marketing	March 2025	Success stories published using appropriate media channels including: Buzz / DC News/ Press releases and social media
Promote internal, regional and national apprenticeship awards to recognise achievements and celebrate success	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Recognised in the Government's Top 10 Employers list in 2021 Supports National Apprenticeship Awards
Review the apprenticeship guidance for managers including pay rates and support for apprentices	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	

Action 3: To widen participation in the council's apprenticeship programme, by targeting and maximising opportunities for those who face the most challenges to accessing employment.

Actions	Responsibility	Timescale	Update/Progress
Advertise apprenticeship vacancies via a wide range of channels to reach target groups	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Vacancies advertised through NEJP, National Apprenticeship Service website, schools/colleges/universities and social media
Strengthen links with schools, colleges and universities to promote apprenticeships and careers at the council	Head of HR and Employee Services	September 2022	Programme in place for the attendance at career events
Support the council's corporate parenting responsibilities by ensuring apprenticeships are available and accessible to care leavers including ring-fencing suitable apprenticeships	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Guaranteed interview scheme in place for care leavers who meet the essential criteria Traineeships in place to prepare Care Leavers for an apprenticeship Ring-fenced opportunities identified
To develop a structured approach to broaden opportunities for people with special educational needs and disabilities including ring-fencing	Head of HR and Employee Services/Strategic	March 2025	Supported through the council's DuhamEnable Service

suitable apprenticeships for the council's DurhamEnable clients	Manager Progression and Learning		
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Action 4: To support people to progress into employment through the apprenticeship route.

Actions	Responsibility	Timescale	Update/Progress
Strengthen tracking systems to monitor retention and achievement	Head of HR and Employee Services	June 2022	
Work with managers to support the retention of apprentices within the council	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	
Equip apprentices with employability skills and ensure they have the skills needed to make that next move in their career	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	
Conduct exit interviews with apprentices leaving the council to ascertain actual progression routes	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	

Action 5: To work in partnerships with Members, Trade Unions, training providers, suppliers, businesses and other local authorities to promote and deliver apprenticeship opportunities.

Actions	Responsibility	Timescale	Update/Progress
Work with elected Members to promote the apprenticeship programme across the county	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Members attend corporate apprenticeship induction events
Work with recognised trades unions to promote apprenticeships, encourage take-up and continue to develop the council's approach	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Trade Unions attend corporate apprenticeship induction events Updates on the apprenticeship programme given at the Corporate Consultative Forum
Engage with training providers to ensure quality of apprenticeship training provision to meet the identified skills gaps within the council	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	
Engage with trailblazer groups to develop new apprenticeship standards to meet future needs	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Representation on trailblazer group to develop the Social Worker Apprenticeship Standard

Identify opportunities to engage with other local authorities in partnership working on specific apprenticeship projects	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	Supported by the regional local authority apprenticeship group
Identify social value opportunities via procurement and contract management activities	Chief Procurement Officer	March 2025	Updates based on delivered outcomes
Introduce an apprenticeship levy transfer policy to ensure the levy is fully utilised and supports other organisations to deliver apprenticeship opportunities	Head of HR and Employee Services	April 2023	

Action 6: To engage with maintained schools to ensure they maximise the benefits from the levy and promote apprenticeship opportunities.

Actions	Responsibility	Timescale	Update/Progress
Support maintained schools to maximise apprenticeship opportunities and access levy funds to meet skills gaps and plan future workforce needs	Head of HR and Employee Services	March 2025	LGA Toolkit for Schools
Establish a working group to include Head Teachers and School Business Managers to help support the development of an apprenticeship programme and promote the value of apprenticeships across maintained schools	Head of HR and Employee Services	September 2022	

For advice regarding the application of this document please contact:

HR Advice and Support

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Author	Version	Last review	Next review
HR OD/WFD	V2.0	April 2022	April 2025

